

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 8157

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SHUM, AR
SUBJECT: VIDELA INTERVIEW WITH AMERICAN JOURNALISTS

1. INTERVIEW WITH PRES. VIDELA OF GROUP OF AMERICAN JOURNALISTS VISITING ARGENTINA AT INVITATION OF GOA WAS PUBLISHED IN LOCAL PRESS DEC. 14. THERE WERE NO STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS OF NEW INFORMATION, BUT SOME OF VIDELA'S COMMENTS WERE INTERESTING. ASSUME FULL TEXT WILL REACH ARA/EC BY FBIS OR DESK COPIES OF BUENOS AIRES PRESS.

2. VIDELA CHARACTERIZED RELATIONS WITH U.S., OR IN PRESS TERMS "IMAGE," AT TWO LEVELS: FIRST IS OFFICIAL RELATION WITH USG, EXPRESSED THROUGH AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES AND GOA EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON, AND THROUGH FREQUENT VISITS OF OFFICIALS OF BOTH COUNTRIES TO THE OTHER. AT THIS LEVEL, HE FOUND COMPREHENSION OF THE "REAL SITUATION" IN ARGENTINA. ON OTHER HAND, "POPULAR" IMAGE IN U.S. IS LESS FAVORABLE, REFLECTING LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF ARGENTINA AND "DISTORTED INFORMATION" ELABORATED BY "THOSE WHO ARE FRIENDS NEITHER OF ARGENTINE NOR THE U.S." GOA IS UNHAPPY OVER THIS IMAGE, BUT PLEASED WITH GOOD RELATIONS ON OFFICIAL LEVEL.

3. VIDELA WAS ASKED TO COMPARE HIS GOVT WITH THAT OF CHILE. HE STEERED CLEAR OF QUESTION ON GROUNDS OF STRICT NONINTERVENTION
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IN AFFAIRS OF COUNTRY WHICH IS NEIGHBOR AND CLOSE FIELD.

4. HE DISCOUNTED "RUMORS" OF TENSIONS WITHIN THE JUNTA AND BETWEEN THE SERVICES, ADMITTING TO NO MORE THAN NATURAL AND HEALTHY COMPETITION OF VIEWS AMONG MILITARY LEADERS WHO HOWEVER REMAIN UNIFIED UNDER GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND GOALS.

5. ONE JOURNALIST ASKED IF THERE HAD NOT BEEN "A CERTAIN EXCESS OF ZEALOUSNESS" ON THE PART OF THE SECURITY FORCES IN COMBATTING SUBVERSION. VIDELA REPLIED WITH REVIEW OF SITUATION BEFORE COUP OF MARCH 1976, WHEN "PARAMILITARY AND PARAPOLICE" GROUPS DID INDEED OPERATE, ON THEIR OWN, AGAINST SUBVERSIVES. HOWEVER, FROM MOMENT OF COUP, HE CLAIMED, ARMED FORCES DETERMINED TO EXERCISE EXCLUSIVELY THE USE OF FORCE TO IMPOSE ORDER. BUT, HE ADMITTED, "THERE MAY REMAIN VESTIGES OF THOSE GROUPS WHICH OPERATE OUTSIDE THE LAW." HE ADMITTED FURTHER THAT THOSE IN THE HIGHER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT WHO GIVE ORDERS IN THE BATTLE AGAINST SUBVERSION ARE OLDER, MORE MATURE, BETTER EDUCATED, WHILE THOSE WHO EXECUTE ORDERS ARE GENERALLY YOUNG, IMMATURE, AND OF A DIFFERENT CULTURAL LEVEL. BECAUSE OF THIS, HE COULD NOT DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOME EXCESS MIGHT BE COMMITTED WHICH HE COULD NOT JUSTIFY, AS HE COULD NOT ACCEPT THAT THIS COULD BE CONSIDERED NORMAL, OR THAT IT IS CUSTOMARY, OR THAT THERE COULD BE ANY WISH (I.E. ON THE PART OF THE LEADERSHIP) THAT SUCH EXCESSES SHOULD OCCUR.

6. JOURNALIST FOLLOWED UP WITH QUESTION AS TO WHETHER VIDELA HAD GIVEN SPECIFIC ORDERS TO HIS SUBORDINATES NOT RPT NOT TO USE TORTURE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. VIDELA REPLIED THAT IT WAS NOT ONLY MATTER OF ORDERS, BUT OF REGULAR, FREQUENT STUDY AND DAILY ATTENTION.

5. COMMENT: THIS IS PERHAPS THE MOST CANDID STATEMENT ON THESE SUBJECTS WHICH VIDELA HAS MADE IN PUBLIC SO FAR, PARTICULARLY IN THE MATTER OF ABUSES BY THE SECURITY FORCES. HIS ADMISSION THAT EXCESSES MAY BE COMMITTED BY THE SECURITY FORCES AS WELL AS

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"OUTSIDE GROUPS" OVER WHICH THE GOA HAS NO CONTROL IS SOMETHING NEW AND REPRESENTS A WELCOME CHANGE FROM GUZZETTI'S FORMULA THAT THERE WERE NO RIGHT-WING TERRORISTS, ONLY "ANTI-BODIES". VIDELA CAREFULLY MAINTAINED THE ESSENTIALS OF THE GOA'S PAST POSITION, BUT EVEN THIS SMALL STEP TOWARDS A MORE CANDID AND HONEST APPRAISAL IS WELCOME. TO BE SURE, HIS ATTEMPT TO ASSIGN GUILT FOR EXCESSES EXCLUSIVELY TO "YOUNG AND IMMATURE" SOLDIERS AND POLICE IN THE FRONT LINES OF THE STRUGGLE REPRESENTS MORE FLUMMERY THAN EXPLANATION. WE KNOW THAT SENIOR MILITARY AND POLICE OFFICIALS, UP TO THE LEVEL AT LEAST OF POLICE CHIEFS AND CORPS COMMANDERS, HAVE ORDERED AND AUTHORIZED SOME OF THE WORST ABUSES, AND HAVE CERTAINLY MADE NO STRENUOUS EFFORT IN THE MAJORITY OF CASES TO STOP ABUSES BEING COMMITTED BY THE SUBORDINATE LEVELS. HOWEVER, VIDELA COULD NOT REALISTICALLY BE EXPECTED TO MAKE SUCH AN ADMISSION; THUS, HIS LIMITED STATEMENT ON THE SUBJECT IS AT LEAST AN INDICATION THAT HE RECOGNIZES THAT PREVIOUS FLAT DENIALS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR ABUSES IN THE SECURITY FORCES ARE NOT CREDITABLE.

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